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CHILD OF THE AMAZONS

AND OTHER POEMS

BY MAX EASTMAN

ENJOYMENT OF POETRY

CHILD OF THE AMAZONS

AND OTHER POEMS

MAX EASTMAN

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CHILD OF THE AMAZONS

The Amazons, according to a fable not without historic significance, were a tribe of female warriors who dwelt upon the river Thermodon, near the Euxine Sea. Annually, to perpetuate their race, they joined the men of a fighting nation upon Mount Caucasus; but of the offspring of these unions they saved only the girls. Their patron deity was the virgin Artemis, who is here identified with a star visible at dawn. Their queen, Penthesilea, was slain by Achilles in the fight at Troy.

CHILD OF THE AMAZONS

I

WHEN in the orient the almighty sun
Swings up his burning shield, and brandishes
A shaft of light against the leaguèd skies,
When the sea smoketh, and the forest oaks
Forget the storm gone over them and tremble
In the furious rising of the dawn—
Then join her councillors to counsel war!
Then throng they out unto the forest old,
The high and awful chamber of their queen,
Bringing in sinewy hands their iron spears,
Her captains—who are women old and wild,
Homeless, unchaste, worn with the battle anger
And the weight of weapons swung in heat.
No mirth, no music, no barbaric splendor
Doth explain them, or adorn their pride.
Scarred and unloved and terrible they are!
Yet not the experienced earth doth go thro' heaven
With a more tempered majesty and power,

Than they go thro' the verdurous colonnades
And living aisles of their uncovered temple.
For where the trees unveil unto the dawn
A summit old, a windy sanctuary,
There doth the royal warrior summon them.
There by her savage altar doth she stand,
Immense with beauty, like a sexless god,
Imperial oaks lifting their arms behind her,
And the East nourishing her limbs with light.
She, as they come, doth lift her voice to them
In high and ardent music:

'O ye powers,
Free-clad, armed like the sun with javelins!
Deeds would become you well, so well arrayed!
Have ye not lingered by this stream enough,
And paced along the murmurous strand, and dozed,
And watched this bay yawning beside the sea?
O, are ye sick with hunger for events?
Then ye shall have them! Ye shall ride with me

To the adventure on the plains of Troy,
Where now the proudest of the oppressors moors
His ships, and marshals his vainglorious arms,
To capture that which he could never hold——
The cool rebellious soul of her that scorned him!'

So her passion sings, and they with arms
Ring the reply. She lifts a regal spear
For silence, and she saith:
'Who would excel
In war must first excel in government.
Yet here a very child defies our law:
That singer, maker of the battle hymns,
Thyone, whom with every hope we loved—
Always the fleetest of the dancing girls,
And strongest when they wrestle in the meadow—
Even Thyone, out of battle born,
Doth shirk the enterprise of soldiery!
And 'tis the common tale—the mind bewitched
By some high warrior, the body too

Grows lazy and unmuscular with love!
Yet never does she lose her spirit bold,
But dares revolt, and plead against my will,
That she may have the amazing soldier with her,
Dwell with him, as do the nations against whom,
Implacable, we swing the scourge of war!
This hour she comes to you to plead, and feel
Your scorn.'

She paused; and to them there appeared,
Like a swift spirit from the shadowy trees,
A form as fresh as the remembered winds
Of dawn—Thyone, called the Sea-wild Maid.
Upright and young before the queen, she led
All eyes in silence brief unto her own.

'I come unarmed into the council, Queen.
I prayed not to the unlistening star this morn,
But to a warm God whom I have called Love.
Love hath disarmed me.'

Softly thus she spoke,
Yet in her voice was more of empire than
Of love. And for a breath, no answer—till
The queen, with equal calm, said:
'We have heard
How mellow you have grown these Summer days!
We called you here to sing us a sweet lay,
We being tired of duty. Will you sing?'

Her irony the girl dismayed with candor
When she said, raising her eyes:
'O Queen,
To me the morning is not jubilant
Tho' all her wander-wingèd minstrels sing,
And the sweet insects pipe their joys aloft;
To me the day is dreary, tho' his light
Flows down around me as of old.—But when
The wind herds forward many clouds along
The pastures of the sun, I welcome them;
And in the arms of night my sorrow sleepeth.'

'Yea! But come, the story! Tell us that!
Unto whose power art thou this listless captive?'

'I think thou knowest that he is a king.'

'They say you sit among the meadow grass
And sing to him—is this thy exercise?
Thou big and silly child!'

'Most scornful Queen,
Not long we sat amid the blossoming grass
Before the sea rose and came over us,
And we were drowned, and lay together, still,
Without breath.—Spake I with a child's voice?'

'A voice that angers me—the voice of love
And of a dreamer lost!'

'Yea, I am lost!'

'Hast thou no will, no hunger after deeds
Swift and heroic?'

'O my heart is hungry!
All my life is swift and wild with passion!
It is a flame carried in the wind!'

Unto her cry her body gave
All eloquence; her gestures seemed to move
On infinite curves inherited of gods.
And the dark warriors stirred; but not their queen,
Who cried:

'Darest thou at this shrine defy
Our law, which is the agèd word of God?
Fearest thou not the empire of these armed?
They call it traitorous to smuggle in
Outlawed and poisonous thoughts! They know
Your kind! Think you this nation has grown great
Without the trembling public death of traitors?
Think you we drag our cowards on to glory?'

Thyone said: 'Am I a coward, in
That I defy the dreadful laws of God?'

'Ay, they are dreadful!' cried the queen, and shook
Her lofty spear in fury, beautiful.
'And thou shalt swiftly know their dreadfulness!
Ay, thou shalt hear the Law of Amazons,
And learn what romance sleepeth on the tune!
We lie not in the vice of love! We breed
At night, at morn we are away to wars!
O hath thy blood no fiery wish to fight,
To fly with the light-armed over the plain?'

'My blood doth burn against the sacrifice,
To momentary deeds, of passionate
Lifelong desire, and the deep hopes of love!
Is this that famous freedom that thy law
Doth vaunt? O is this liberty, to lose
For liberty all that the heart desires?'

'Thou piteous and pleading soldier! Dost
Thou hope to whirl a spear with lovelorn muscle?
Thou canst dishonor time with languid talk,
O Easy-tongue, but thou wilt alter not

The wish of God. For I am not thy judge,
But Artemis, unpassioned, unsubdued.
' "Have ye the virgin's heart!"—saith Artemis.
"Needs must ye give your bodies, hostages
Unto mortality—give not your souls!
This be the chastity of Amazons!
Exiled, who forfeits this, and from you scourged,
Shall seek among tyrannic nations that
Inactive servitude which ye renounce!"—

'Thus reads the immortal law; the choice is thine.
Thou canst find out thy way unto thy lord,
Succumb to him, thy vigorous spirit all,
To tend his fire and wipe his fireside gods,
And be to him the softness of a couch—
So be he deign thee thy sweet sips of love!
Our souls shall drink the flaming wine of deeds!
And thou not with us? O consult thy heart!
Consult thy heart, and bring thine answer when
The light again is swelling in the East!'

II

In the mild-mannered beauty of the morn,
When birds sing eastward and their throats are filled
With song, and in a shrill continual chant
The little people of the grass profess
Their wakefulness unto the slumbering earth,
Then doth the sea her song perpetual
Relinquish, and lieth down whispering
Peace to the patient sands, and listeneth.
On such a morn, and at the gentle hour
Of opening eyes, Thyone came unto
The council, armed, and in her hand the spear.
Yet as she stept across the grass her feet
Were languid, and her eyes looked down, lest they
Too tearfully reflect the light of dawn.

Where, O thou soul rebellious, goest thou?
What potentate hath power o'er thee but joy?
Hearest thou not Love wandering forlorn

Upon the mountain meadows calling thee?
Hearest thou not the future calling thee?
Must thy bright hopes expire while they are born,
As dewdrops scatter at the wink of morn?

So sings her mind to her the while she moves
In sorrow, carrying a drooping spear.
Yet when she comes in sight of them, who stand
In cruel panoply around their queen,
Drinking her lust of action, eyeing her,
Holding the solemn jubilee of war—
Then doth Thyone raise her face to meet
The morning light, her limbs spring firm with pride,
And in her eyes the imperial will of God
Flasheth again, as on her arms his signal
Gleams. She lifts her spear against the sun,
And dawns upon that resolute array,
A victor, and a soul compelling them.

'O Queen and stormy counsellors of war—
Unto the temple hall a warrior comes!

I join the music of your concourse wild!
Yet unto thee, thou sovereign cold, I say
That I obey, but honor not, thy will.
Thou art my fate, and with thy iron arm
Dost point to an intolerable choice.
A blazèd tree upon the forking road
Thou art; at early morn I pause by thee,
My tearless eyes sending their sight eastward
Up to the mountain pastures of our love,
The hills, the water-meadows, and the woods—
O God in heaven keep them beautiful!
O high farewell to you, ye Summer Hours!
O Romance, idle, sweet, and transitory!
Yea, I can say a strong farewell to you!
I'd learned ere now, in the long hour of gloom,
Your being is to be but vanishing!
Yet O, beyond you, and beyond the hills,
There are the regions of the surely blest!
And travelling onward, I would come like dawn

Into the land of mothers, where the hours
Serene and elevated wait for me!

'Thou, warlike Queen, hast thou ne'er nestled down
To earth with thy blood singing, and thy limbs
Oppressed with joy! Hast thou not sobbed with wonder,
Not known the sudden motion in the night,
The doubt, the expectancy, the terror beautiful?
Yea, thou hast known them! And thou hast brought forth
A very little body like thine own,
And touched and loved him for the dimple, and
The ring of blue between his half-wide lids!
Yea, thou hast had him torn from thy wild arms
By these unshakable laws, whereon thou stand'st
To judge me! O my Queen, I weep for thee,
Though thou art great, and seasoned against woe!
Thy character is iron, I cannot
Shake thee with memories, nor alter thee
With an incessant quantity of tears!'

'Thyone,' saith the queen, 'thou dost express
A thing the law knows not, remembers not.
And thou dost speak to one who hath long since
Been tempered in the tremulous fires of love,
And hath all passion borne and burned with it,
And issued forth as steely and secure
As the immortals are who fan such flames!
Therefore I counsel thee to scourge from thee
These thoughts, and cease thy woeful eloquence,
And give thy gift of music on the tongue
To praise and sing the conquerors of fire!'

To whom, with quick light-giving eyes, the girl
Replied:

'With gladness will I sing and praise
Thy company of soldiers whom I love,
Whom I have envied since that windy day
When first they startled me, and set my eyes
In childhood dancing. I have never lost,
Even in the slow warm winds of midnight when

His voice remembered quivered on my ear—
I've never lost my love for thy battalions!
Heroic joys they ever offer me—
Those visions valorous of my young heart!

'O to command the tumult of a troop
Of battle horses! to possess that space
That flees like wind before them to the foe!
To come, with so much thunder at my back,
Into the fainting noise of a drawn battle—
Borne on a stallion uncontrollable
And racing for the lead, to cling to him
With supple limbs that feel his muscles roll,
And with free arms to do the flying deeds
Of cavalry! O God, could I forget
These glories?—Or the more precarious joy,
The exuberance of danger, when at night
I, like the hunting leopard, shall creep forth
In softness, and steal in upon my prey
To capture him, or scout in solitude
About his barracks!

'O I love to live!—
The task and the adventure, toil and rest,
And mirth, and the hot news of accident!
I love to live, impetuous, for joy
And woe, a life of action unto God!
Triumphantly I choose it! I renounce
My wish of love, my hope, my fruitful years!
For who would be the consort of a king,
Subduer of the earth, and be subdued?
Who would bring into this heroic world
A child, before she had gone forth to prove
That she herself was equal to the world?
Too long the heirs of man content themselves
With a divided portion. I will never
Be the idle ornament of time,
Futile and pale and foreign to the earth,
Nor with a weak and fluent life dilute
The heritage of those bright heroes who
Shall yet subdue the world!

'I love that law—
O Artemis, thy seeing law—that saith
No Amazon shall enter motherhood
Until she hath performed such deeds, and wrought
Such impact on the energetic world,
That thou canst it behold and name her thine.
Grant me, O Goddess free, that I may burn
And kindle thro' some drama ere I die!

'O thou divine Intelligence, where thou
Dost wheel thy silver chariot along
The dark perimeter of utmost heaven,
Lean low thine ear to hear my resolution!
No, give me power and I will pray to thee
A prayer that dares ascend, and like a sun
Or streaming meteor, greet and startle thee!
I pray that I shall yet defy thee, thou
Far Deity, and lay the regal hand
Of man upon thy law to alter it;
To herald the far age when men shall cease
Their tyranny, Amazons their revolt.

Renouncing each a sad unnatural dream,
They shall go forth together to subdue
Unto their symmetry the monstrous world,
And with the night lie down in powerful union!

'Henceforth, my sovereign, perfect is my will
To do thy deeds and be thy Amazon—
Though I postpone unto the end my hope.
For if it is an excellence to bear,
Then is it a thing prior, more divine,
To be. I join the counsellors of war.'

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

TO A TAWNY THRUSH

PINE spirit!
Breath and voice of a wild glade!
In the wild forest near it,
In the cool hemlock or the leafy limb,
Whereunder
Thou didst run and wander
Thro' the sun and shade,
An elvish echo and a shadow dim,
There in the twilight thou dost lift thy song,
And give the stilly woods a silver tongue.
Out of what liquid is thy laughing made?
A sister of the water thou dost seem,
The quivering cataract thou singest near,
Whose glistening stream,
Unto the listening ear,
Thou dost outrun with thy cascade
Of music beautiful and swift and clear—
A joy unto the mournful forest given!
As when afar
A travelling star

TO A TAWNY THRUSH

Across our midnight races,
A moving gleam that quickly ceases,
Lost in the blue black abyss of heaven,
So doth thy light and silver singing
Start and thrill
The silence round thy piney hill,
Unto the sober hour a jewel bringing—
A mystery—a strain of rhythm fleeing—
A vagrant echo winging
Back to the unuttered theme of being!

COMING SPRING

ICE is marching down the river,
Gaily out to sea!
Sunbeams o'er the snow-hills quiver,
Setting torrents free!

Yellow are the water-willows,
Yellow clouds are they,
Rising where the laden billows
Swell along their way!

Arrows of the sun are flying!
Winter flees the light,
And his chilly horn is sighing
All the moisty night!

Lovers of the balmy weather,
Lovers of the sun!
Drifts and duty melt together—
Get your labors done!

COMING SPRING

Ice is marching down the river,
  Gaily out to sea!
Sing the healthy-hearted ever,
  Spring is liberty!

DAISIES

DAISIES, daisies, all surprise!
Open wide your sunny eyes!
See the linnet on the wing;
See the crimson feather!
See the life in every thing,
Sun, and wind, and weather!
Shadow of the passer-by,
Bare-foot skipping over,
Meadow where the heifers lie,
Butter-cup, and clover!
All is vivid, all is real!
All is high surprising!
Ye are pure to see and feel;
Ye the gift are prizing
Men and gods would perish for—
Gods with all their thunder!—
Could they have the thing ye are,
Everlasting wonder!

SUMMER SONG

I WANDER on the sunny lea,
Where yellow-birds sing liberty,
And briar-roses bless the air
With gracefulness and fragrance rare;
The sky is very blue to see,
A living blue so near to thee,
And clouds caress the meadow fair,
Trailing rapid shadows there.
O come and wander on the lea!
O wander in the sun with me!

Ay, thou art with me, gypsy lass,
Noiseless as the airs that pass;
Slender as the shadow things
The rose-vine on the meadow flings,
Graceful as the wavy grass;
And tender too, as tender as
The trembling of the she-bird's wings,
Whose golden little lover sings.
A happy song my wand'ring has,
For thou art with me, gypsy lass!

ADVENTURE

IN dreadfu' jungles I ha'e never been,
Nor seen at e'en the tiger's stripes a-glowing;
But i' the bracken by the purling linn,
Mine e'en ha'e seen the tiger-lily growing.

DIOGENES

A HUT, and a tree,
And a hill for me,
And a piece of a weedy meadow.

I'll ask no thing,
Of God or King,
But to clear away His shadow.

AUTUMN LANDSCAPE

THE sad light sayeth how all Autumn grieves,
And how this rainy mist in heaven high
Doth wake the sorrowings that deepest lie.
Behold the silent forms shorn of their leaves,
The elm, the maple, and the antique oak—
With gestures sorrowful they pray the sky.
Behold the rain-pools where the brown leaves soak,
And the same mournful branches mirrored lie.
See how the sensuous mist, cool-smelling, slips
Like a wilful garment down from those wet limbs
Which will be gracious to the singing lips
Of the expected wind!—For he will come!
I hear him waken as the twilight dims,
And my heart quickens, and my words are dumb!

IN REMEMBRANCE

COULD I bestow on you all blessings—O,
As bright and many as the glittering sky
Of night in his out-reaching arms can hold,
They would not tell, they would but ache to tell,
The all-wishing love in sadness of this hour.
There is but one bright gift, the gift is yours.
You too can come alone unto these hills,
The streamy woods and meadows wandering,
You too can come alone unto these hills,
And drink, drink from their heart of memory
The sweetest sorrow that e'er touched the world.

SUMMER SUNDAY

BORNE on the low lake wind there floats to me,
Out of the distant hill, a sigh of bells,
Mystic, worshipful, almost unheard,
As tho' the past should answer me,—and I
In pagan solitude bow down my head.

SONNET

THE passions of a child attend his dreams.
He lives, loves, hopes, remembers, is forlorn,
For legendary creatures, whom he deems
Not too unreal—until one golden morn
The gracious, all-awaking sun shines in
Upon his tranquil pillow, and his eyes
Are touched, and opened greatly, and begin
To drink reality with rich surprise.

I loved the impetuous souls of ancient story—
Heroic characters, kings, queens, whose wills
Like empires rose, achieved, and fell, in glory.
I was a child—until the radiant dawn,
Thy beauty, woke me. O thy spirit fills
The stature of those heroes, they are gone!

TO A MEADOW LARK

WHEN the enkindling spring upon the lea
Was quenched with water, and the rainy throng
Of clouds perpetual had drowned her song—
Still thou didst lift thy heart and float to me,
Over the mist, thy lonely melody!
O swell again the throat, and thrill the tongue,
And rouse, and ravish with thy passion young,
The adoring air that drinks thine ecstasy!
She hides her beauty in the wavy shroud
Of April's swift and half-translucent cloud—
My love is lost in a more heavy shadow!
My love is buried in the arms of grief!
O send to her across the mourning meadow
That brighter sorrow thine—that music brief!

TO AN EARLY RISER

THE eastern hill hath scarce unveiled his head,
And the deliberate sky hath but begun
To meditate upon a future sun,
When thou dost rise from thy impatient bed.
Thy morning prayer unto the stars is said.
And not unlike a child, the penance done
Of sleep, thou goest to thy serious fun,
Exuberant—yet with a whisper tread!

And when that lord doth to the world appear,
The jovial sun, he leans on his old hill,
And levels forth to thee a golden smile—
Thee in his garden, where each warming year
Thou toilest in all joy with him, to fill
And flood the soil with Summer for a while.

TO THE LITTLE BED AT NIGHT

GOOD-NIGHT, little bed, with your patient white pillow,
Your light little spread, and your blanket of yellow!
I wonder what leaves you so pensive to-night—
The breezes are tender, the stars are so bright,
I should think you would wrinkle a little and smile,
And be happy to think we can sleep for a while!
Are you waiting for something? Or are you just seeming
To listen so breathlessly, hushed, as though dreaming
A form that is fresher than breezes of light,
A coming more precious than stars to the night,
Who shall mould you as soft as the breast of a billow,
And crown with all beauty your patient white pillow?
Good-night, little bed—are you lonely so late?
We will lie down together, together we'll wait.

ONE DAY IN THE YEAR

HOW suddenly the day is warm when Winter yields,
And Spring blows her first breath over the lonely fields!
The drifts are sinking,
The soaked earth is drinking
Their coolness in.
And all farm sounds begin;
All fowls and cattle their strange praise renew.
And a more quiet worship wakes in you.
Have you cried unto memories fleeing so fast?
This day they will answer you out of the past!

TO THE ASCENDING MOON

RISE, rise, aerial creature, fill the sky
With supreme wonder, and the bleak earth wash
With mystery! Pale, pale enchantress, steer
Thy flight high up into the purple blue,
Where faint the stars beholding! Rain from there
Thy lucent influence upon this sphere!
I fear thee, sacred mother of the mad!
With thy deliberate magic thou of old
Didst soothe the perplexed brains of idiots whipped,
And scared, and lacerated for their cure—
Ay, thou didst spread the balm of sleep on them,
Give to their minds a curvèd emptiness
Of silence like the heaven thou dwellest in;
Yet didst thou also, with thy rayless light,
Make mad the surest, draw from their smooth beds
The very sons of Prudence, maniacs
To wander forth among the bushes, howl
Abroad like eager wolves, and snatch the air!
Oft didst thou watch them prowl among the tombs
Inviolate of the patient dead, toiling

TO THE ASCENDING MOON

In deeds obscure with stealthy ecstasy,
And thou didst palely peer among them, and
Expressly shine into their unhinged eyes!
I fear thee, languid mother of the mad!
For thou hast still thy alien influence;
Thou dost sow forth thro' all the fields and hills,
And in all chambers of the natural earth,
A difference most strange and luminous.
This tree, that was the river sycamore,
Is in thy pensive effluence become
But the conceivèd essence of a tree,
Upright luxuriance thought upon—the stream
Is liquid timeless motion undefined—
The world's a gesture dim! Like rapturous thought,
Which can the rigorous concrete obscure
Unto annihilation, and create
Upon the dark a universal vision,
Thou—even on this bold and local earth,
The site of the obtruding actual—
Thou dost erect in awful purity
The filmy architecture of all dreams.

And they are perfect. Thou dost shed like light
Perfection, and a vision give to man
Of things superior to the tough act,
Existence, and almost co-equals of
His own unnamed, and free, and infinite wish!
Phantoms, phantoms of the transfixed mind!
I fear thee, mother of the sacred mad,
For thou with beauty dost awake in me
Such yearning as but God laid hold upon,
Or mania laying hold, can satisfy.

Pour down, O moon, upon the listening earth—
The earth unthinking, thy still eloquence!
Shine in the children's eyes. They drink thy light,
And laugh in innocence of sorcery,
And love thy silver. I laugh not, nor gaze
With half-closed eyes upon the awakened night.
Nay, oft when thou art hailed above the hill,
I lean not forth, I hide myself in tasks,
Even to the blunt comfort of routine
I cling, to drowse my soul against thy charm,
Yearning for thee, ethereal miracle!

EARTH'S NIGHT

SOMBRE,
Sombre is the night, the stars' light is dimmed
With smoky exhalations of the earth,
Whose ancient voice is lifted on the wind
In ceaseless elegies and songs of tears.
O earth, I hear thee mourning for thy dead!
Thou art waving the long grass over thy graves!
Murmuring over all thy resting children,
That have run and wandered and gone down
Upon thy bosom—Thou wilt mourn for him
Who looketh now a moment on these stars,
And in the moving boughs of this dark night
Heareth the murmurous sorrow of thy heart.

IN A DUNGEON OF RUSSIA

Scene: A cell leading to the gallows.
Characters: A noble lady, who is an assassin.
A common murderer.

The chilling gray, a ghost of mortal dawn,
Has touched them, and they know the hour. The guard
Shifts guiltily his shoes upon the stone;
They raise their eyes in languid terror. But
The moment passes, and 'tis still again—
Save, in some piteous way she moves her throat.
There is a wandering of her burning eyes,
Until they fix, and strangely stare upon
The face of her companion. They would plead
Against the heavy horror of his look;
For not an idiot's corpse could strike the soul
More sick with wonder.
'O look up and speak
To me!'—Her voice is startling to the walls—
'Speak any word against this gloom!'
He moves
A blood-deserted eye, but answers not.

'Tell if 'twas cold and filthy where you lay!'

'Ay, filthy cold! 'Twas cold enough to keep
The carrion from rotting on these bones!
They never kill us—never 'til we hang!'

He spoke a brutal tongue against the gloom.
And there was heard far off a step, a voice.
The guard stood up; a quiver moved her limbs.

'Give me some simpler word. Give me your hand
In comradeship. We die together—and
The while we breathe—we are each other's world.'

'No—not your world, my lady! Though we die,
I have no grace to give a hand to you!
My hand is thick and dirty—yours is pale!'

'You say "my lady" in the very tomb!
Will even death not laugh this weakness off
Your tongue? To think nobility abides

This hour! *My lady!* O, it is a curse
That whips me at the grave! I was not born—
Can I not even die, a human soul?'

'Ay, you can die! And better—you can kill!
'Tis not your ladyship—the gallows' rope
Snaps that to nothing! Death? Not death alone
Can laugh at your nobility—I laugh!
No—not your piteous ladyship—that dies!
It is your crime that daunts me!—That shall live!
To plant, with this fine delicate little hand,
Small, heavy death into the very heart
Of time-defended tyranny—that lives!
The future is all life for you! For me—
A glassy look, a yell into the air,
And I am gone! No life springs up from me!
I am the dirt that drank the drippings of
A guilty murder—that is why I sit
Like sickness here, and goad you with my shame!
I'll take your hand! I'll tell you I was starved,

Wrecked, shattered to the bones with drunken hunger,
And I killed for gold! I'll tell you this—
Your crime shall live to blot the memory
Of mine, and me, and all the insane tribe
Of us, who having strength in poverty
Will not lie down and starve—blot off the world
Our having been—the crime of our killed hopes,
And gradual infamy!'

The fever gleam
Was in his eyes—the future! There it burned
A moment, while he stood to see the door
Swing darkly open, and the guard salute.
She stood beside him. And together, in
High union of their fainting hearts, they faced
The hour that brought them to their level graves.

CONVENTIONAL LIFE

MIDNIGHT is come,
And thinly in the deepness of the gloom
Truth rises startle-eyed out of a tomb,
And we are dumb.

A death-bell tolls,
And we still shudder round the too smooth bed,
For Truth makes pallid watch above the dead,
Freezing our souls!

But day returns,
Light and the garish life, and we are brave,
For Truth sinks wanly down into her grave.
Yet the heart yearns.

IN MARCH

ON a soaked fence-post a little blue-backed bird,
Opening her sweet throat, has stirred
A million music-ripples in the air
That curl and circle everywhere.
They break not shallow at my ear,
But quiver far within. Warm days are near!

THE BURIAL OF DE SOTO*

WOODS and the cry of wild things and the solitary stars,
And no wind on the black river's bosom—
Save what is stirred by your slow bier
That I see moving there, O wanderer!
And yet there floats to my dim sense the cool new smell of the earth about your body.
Who are they two that hold up smoky flames over the envious water?
Who are they two that stoop, with bending elbows,
Moving with a prayer,
And lift you, and lower you again,
And stand for an eternal moment eyeing the water while it grows still,
And while you waver dimly down to your cool station
In the oozy floor of that inconstant tomb?
They snuff their torches in the mute water,
Gathering to them their reflections,
And they steal with noiseless paddles toward the trees.

* *His person was feared by the Indians, and, in order that they should not know of his death, his body was exhumed and sunk secretly at night into the Mississippi River.*

HAIL TO OCTOBER!

HAIL to October! Healthy is the air!
The flying sky! And gay the dying leaves!
Soulless and free, the winds and waters and the running tunes
Of the brave days of thee, O Autumn!
Songs, and laughter, and no thought beyond the song!
No rest for retrospect, no hope to harbor fear!
Only the light and liberty of life, and death, and motion
Onward uncontrollable, are thine!
Thou art the wind along the road, the shining trees!
Thou art the stealthy rustle thro' the forest!
Thou art the cry of eagles and the shaking of the pine!
The racing cohort of the northern geese,
A sounding arrow—
Thou art the flight of Summer!
The expectancy of Spring!
The swift upbuilding of a tempest in the sun, the moving thunder
And the flying shadows of the wings of clouds
Across the purple mountain! O thou art all distance, and

HAIL TO OCTOBER!

Dim vista, where the eye grazes and takes sustenance of
space!
There are no bounds for thee, no laws for thee, no sense
for thee
But glory in the unutterable and onward sweep of thine
own being!

SONNET

AS the crag eagle to the zenith's height
Wings his pursuit in his exalted hour,
Of her the tempest-reared, whose airy power
Of plume and passion challengeth his flight
To that wild altitude where they unite,
In mutual tumultuous victory
And the swift sting of nature's ecstasy,
Their shuddering pinions and their skyward might—
As they, the strong, to the full height of heaven
Bear up that joy which to the strong is given,
Thus, thus do we, whose stormy spirits quiver
In the bold air of utter liberty,
Clash equal at our highest, I and thee,
Unconquered and unconquering forever!

THE SAINT GAUDENS STATUES

[*Exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum after the sculptor's death. The figures alluded to are the standing statue of Abraham Lincoln, and the monument in memory of Mrs. Henry Adams, the original of which is in the Rock Creek Cemetery at Washington.*]

POET, thy dreams are grateful to the air
And the light loves them. Tho' they murmur not,
Their carven stillness is a music rare,
And like the song of one whose tongue hath caught
The clear ethereal essence of his thought.

I hear the talkers come, the changing throngs
That with the fashions of a day surround
Thy visions, and I hear them quell their tongues,
And hush their querulous shoes upon the ground.
Thy dreams are with the crown of silence crowned—

Though they feel not the glowing diadem,
Who sleep for aye in their cool shapes of stone.
Nor ever will the sunlight waken them,
Nor ever will they turn their eyes and moan,
To think that their brief Poet's life is gone.

The tender and the lofty soul is gone,
Who eyed them forth from darkness, and confessed
His spirit's motion in unmoving stone.
His praise upon no mortal tongue doth rest;
By these unwhispering lips it is expressed.

Soon will the ample arms of night withdraw
Her shuffling children from the twilit hall—
From that heroic presence, in dim awe
Of whom the dark withholds a while her pall,
And leaves him luminous above them all.

Then are ye lost in darkness and alone,
Ye ghostly spirits! And the moment rare
Doth quicken that too sad and nameless stone,
To move her robe, and spill her sable hair,
And be in silence lost upon the air.

For she is one with the dim glimmering hour,
And the white spirits beautiful and still,
And the veiled memory of the vanished power
That moulded them, the high and infinite will
That earth begets and earth doth not fulfil.

AT THE AQUARIUM

SERENE the silver fishes glide,
Stern-lipped, and pale, and wonder-eyed!
As through the agèd deeps of ocean,
They glide with wan and wavy motion!
They have no pathway where they go,
They flow like water to and fro.
They watch with never winking eyes,
They watch with staring, cold surprise,
The level people in the air,
The people peering, peering there,
Who wander also to and fro,
And know not why or where they go,
Yet have a wonder in their eyes,
Sometimes a pale and cold surprise.

THE THOUGHT OF PROTAGORAS

MY memory holds a tragic hour to prove,
Or paint with bleeding stroke, the ancient thought
That will to sorrow move all minds forever—
All that love to know. It was the hour
When lamps wink yellow in the winter twilight,
And the hurriers go home to rest;
And we whose task was meditation rose
And wound a murmuring way among the books
And effigies, the fading fragrance, of
A vaulted library—a place to me
Most like a dim vast cavernous brain, that holds
All the world hath of musty memory
In sombre convolutions that are dying.
There at our faithful table every day,
In the great shadow of this dissolution,
We would speak of things eternal, things
Divine, that change not. And we spoke with one
Who was a leader of the way to them;
A man born regal to the realms of thought.

THE THOUGHT OF PROTAGORAS

High, pale, and sculptural his brow,
And high his concourse with the kings of old,
Plato, and Aristotle, and the Jew—
The bold, mild Jew who in his pensive chamber
Fell in love with God. It was of him,
And that unhungering love of his, he told us;
And with soft and stately melody,
The scholar's eloquence, he lifted us
Sublime above the very motions of
Our mortal being, and we walked with him
The heights of meditation like the gods.
I have no memory surpassing this.
And yet—strange pity of our natures or
Of his—there ran a rumor poisonous.
Scandal breeds her brood in the house of prayer.
And we, to whom these were like hours of prayer,
We whispered things not all philosophy
When he was gone. We knew but little where
He went, or whence he came, but this we knew,
That there was other love in him than what

THE THOUGHT OF PROTAGORAS

He taught us—love that makes more quickly pale!
Ay, even he was tortured with the lure
Of mortal motion in the eyes! And lips
And limbs that were not warm to him alone
Were warm to him. He drank mortality.
Dim care, the ghost of retribution, sat
In pallor on his brow, and made us whisper
In the shadow of our meditations.
Faintly, faintly did we feel the hour
Advancing—livid painting of a thought!
He spoke of Substance,—strangely—on that day—
Eternal, self-existent, infinite—
He seemed, I thought, to rest upon the name.
And as he spoke there came on me that trance
Of inattention, when the words would seem
To drop their magic of containing things,
And, by a shift, become but things themselves—
Mere partial motions of the flesh of lips.
I watched these motions, watched them blandly, till
I knew I watched them, and that roused me, and

THE THOUGHT OF PROTAGORAS

I heard him saying, 'Things, and moving things,
Are merely modes of but one attribute,
Of what is infinite in attributes,
And may be called——' He spoke to there, and then—
His pencil, the thin pencil, dropped—A crack
Behind us—A quick step among the books—
His hand, his head, his body all collapsed
And fell, or settled utterly, before
The fact came on us—he was shot and killed.
But little I remember after that.
What matters it? The deed, the quick red deed
Was done, and all his speculations vanished
Like a sound.

LEIF ERICSON *

THRO' the murk of the ocean of history northward and far,
I descry thee, O Sailor! Thy deed like the dive of a star
Doth startle the ages of darkness thro' which it is hurled,
Doth flash, and flare out, and is gone from the eyes of the world!

What watchers beheld thee, and heralding followed thy lead,
Or bugled the nations into the track of thy deed?
What continent soundeth thy name, what people thy praise?
Who sendeth the signal of gratitude back to the days
When thou in thy boat didst put forth from the world, and defy
Infinity, ignorance, tempest, and ocean, and sky?

** Leif Ericson, the Norse adventurer, sailed to America 500 years before Columbus.*

LEIF ERICSON

No, history brags not of God, nor doth history brag
Of thee, Sailor, who carried thy sail and thy sea-colored flag
Clear over His seas, drove into His mystery old
The prow of thy sixty-foot skerry, whose quivering hold
Could dip but a cupful out of His watery wrath,
That stormed thee, and snatched at thy bowsprit, and licked up thy path!

When mythical rumor sky-carried ran over the earth,
With the whisper of lands that were dreamed of beyond the red birth
Of the west-wind, the blood of thy body took running fire
To launch and be swift o'er the sea as a man's desire!

O rare is the northern morning that shineth for thee!
A million silvering crests on the cold blue sea—
And the wind drives in from the jubilant sea to the land,
And, catching thy laughter, it tosses the cloak in thy hand,

As thou goest forth to thy sails in the frosty air,
Where a thousand press round thee with awe and a wondering prayer.

And they that stand with thee—tumultuous-hearted they stand!
They bend at thy word—I hear the boat sing on the sand—
And they slip to their oars as the boat leaps aloft on a wave,
With thee at the windy helm, joyfully brave!

. . . . . .

The depth of the billows is awful, the depth of the sky
Is silent as God. Silent the dark on high.
Naught sings to thy heart save thy heart and the wind, the wild giant
Of ocean, agrin in the darkness, who rattles defiant
A laugh through thy rigging, and howls from the clouds at thee,
And moans in a mimic of pain and a truculent glee!

Still stern I behold thee, thy stature dim through the dark,
Unmoved, unreleasing the helm of thy storm-driven bark.
'O God of our fathers, give signs to our sea-worn eyes!
Give sight to Thy sailors! Give but the sun to arise
In the morn on an island pale in the haze of the west!
O beam of the Star in the North, is thy only behest
To gesture me onward eternally unto no shore
Of these high and wild waters, famed for their hunger of yore?
Then give to thy sailor for life the courage of death,
To encounter the taunt of this wind with a rougher breath
Of gigantic contempt in the soul for where and when,
So it be onward impetuous, living, onward again!
He saileth safe who saileth with death on board,
He flieth a laughing sail in the wrath of the Lord!'
So sang thy heart to thy heart, and so to the swinging sea
In a lull of the wind, the song of a spirit free!

LEIF ERICSON

Sustained adventurer, lover of distance divine,
Pursuing thy love forever tho' never thine—
O sun-tanned king with thy blue eyes over the sea—
Who hath the living strength to worship thee?

Not they that act with a sanction, and move by a rule,
And lean on a theory—theory saveth the fool!
He asks for no map of the universe, pointer, and plan,
Who hears the rough ocean challenge the roughness of man
To the deeps! Who feeleth existence his spirit defy,
For brief or eternal, standeth not pondering by!
No, Science shall never sing thee, nor ever they
Whose cry is Utility—never the kings of to-day!
The profit of thy great sailing to thee was small;
And unto the world it was nothing—a man, that was all,
And his deed like a star, to flame in the dull old sky
Of the story of apathy, age after decorous age going by!
Grapes were thy import, winey and luscious to eat,
Grapes, and a story—'The dew in the west was sweet!'

LEIF ERICSON

Wine of the distance ever the reddest seems,
And sweet is the world to the dreamer and doer of dreams!
Weigh them, ye pale-headed merchants—Little ye know!
Compute, ye desk-dwellers, ye will not measure him so,
For ye know only knowledge, ye know not the drive of the will
That brought it with passion to birth. It driveth still
Through the hearts of the kindred of Earth the forward fleeing,
The kin of the stormy soul at the helm of all-being!
Sailors, unreefed, and high-masted, and wet, and free,
Who sail in the love of the billows, whose port is the sea—
They sing thee, O Leif the Lucky, they sing thee sublime,
And launch with thee, glad as with God, on the ocean of time!

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